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Red Captors Couldn't Believe

Lone Girl Fooled Them

CPYRGHT

THIS IS THE FOURTH installment in the amazing, exclusive account of the author's experiences at the hands of Communist agents. Miss Hammerstein was released on March 26, 1964, after serving 27 months in Russian and East German jails.

By GABRIELE HAMMERSTEIN
(As Told To Peter Hahn)

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NEW YORK — I stared at the door in terror. It had no handle on the inside. I had walked into a trap of the Soviet secret service inside Communist East Germany.

For the past 14 months, I had led the Russians by the nose, completely without help from U. S. intelligence agents. Feeding them home-made "secret documents," I had sent their agents scurrying to the four corners of the Red empire in Europe, trying to find "agents" who existed only on paper.

And on this day, January 3, 1962, I had followed my "spymaster" Col. Evgeni A. Zaostrovtsev, alias Khedrov, into the KGB compound at Mueggelsee, trusting him like a child. He wanted me to come "for a short indoctrination course" before my return to the United States, he had said.

I felt like a complete fool. What would happen next?

I didn't have long to wait for an answer.

CPYRGHT

Two Russians entered the bedroom-sitting room where I was being held. Both wore civilian clothes. One of them, I learned later, was Major Turpylin — he was to be my interrogator throughout my captivity at the hands of the Russians.

Turpylin stared at me, long and hard. Then he said: "Now, be a good girl, Gabriele. Tell us all about the U. S. intelligence service!"

"What do you mean?," I asked. "I'm working for Mr. Khedrov as a double agent. I referred to an imaginary "Mr. Smith," from whom — as I had told Khedrov — I received the "file cards of contacts in Eastern Europe," which I had manufactured in my flat at Hälensee in the Western sector.

"Yes, we know all about Mr. Smith," said Turpylin. You were in reality working for him all the time, weren't you?"

Actually, he wasn't really wrong — in a manner of speaking. After all, I had actually become involved in this cloak-and-dagger business when an American CIA agent, Bennett, had asked me to report on my meetings with Russians whom I met in East Berlin.

But Bennett had abruptly "dumped" me when I told him that the KGB had asked me to join their side.

CPYRGHT

I was allowed maybe an hour's sleep between questioning. Sometimes, I would be given a bite of food. Sometimes a drink of vodka. And always there was plenty of coffee. I guess it must have been a week later, when Turpylin told me: "Pack your things. You're going on a trip."

I was taken to an airfield where a small twin-engine plane was waiting. The flight lasted several hours. It was still night when we landed.

I asked where I was being taken. One of the guards said: "Does it really matter where you are? You won't be going anywhere for quite a while."

The drive took maybe half an hour. We arrived at a long wooden building and I was taken inside. It looked like a barracks of some kind.

The windows weren't barred, but the snow was piled high outside. I was sure that I was in Russia, and from what I have learned since, I knew that I was being held near Moscow. I was locked in my little cubicle for weeks on end, left absolutely alone.

Then one day, Turpylin had me brought into his office. Khedrov, my "spymaster," was there. He dropped a bombshell for which I was completely unprepared: He showed me photostats of a statement I had written — in longhand — for Bennett of the CIA, just before he had told me that I was "on my own," and that he could do nothing to protect me if I persisted in dealing with the Russians.

CPYRGHT

I broke down and told them the truth. But they wouldn't believe me. It was incredible to Khedrov and his colleagues that a lone woman could dupe one of the world's most efficient spy and counter-spy organizations.

They kept insisting that I held something back. For a while, I was placed in a prison. The interrogations continued. But, slowly, it dawned on Turpylin that my "impossible" story was the truth. I'd, indeed, led his service a merry chase.

My waiting came to an end in May, when I was first returned to the wooden barracks where I had been held before.

Then I was flown back to Berlin, this time — accompanied by guards, of course — in a four-engined airliner. A car drove me to the same intelligence compound at Mueggelsee where the trap had been sprung.

Two days later, I was transferred to the interrogation center of the East German Security Ministry. It is a spotless, ultra - modern prison, but a place of nameless terror for millions of Germans under the Communist whip. I was soon to find out that German efficiency in forcing confessions from prisoners had not changed under the Communists. It was the same as under Hitler, when my parents had to flee from the Gestapo.

(Next: I meet a countryman in jail).

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